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THE STANDING JOINT TASK FORCE: A DOCTRINAL IMPERATIVE

By

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract of

THE STANDING JOINT TASK FORCE: A DOCTRINAL IMPERATIVE

The U.S. military has long recognized the imperative of operating in a joint fashion with highly trained units led by competent professional officers. While at the strategic level of war we have made great strides toward integrating the service components of the military instrument of national power, we have but scratched the surface at the operational level.

Joint Pub 3-0 provides the doctrine for the conduct of joint operations. It permits commanders of unified commands to establish Joint Task Forces (JTFs) to accomplish missions with specific, limited objectives. This doctrine provides the combatant commander three options to be used to form a JTF headquarters (HQ). They are the use of a standing JTF (SJTF) HQ (by definition, a committed force); the formation of an *ad hoc* HQ from various contributors; or the augmentation of a core Service component HQ.

Only the SJTF option provides a JTF staff capable of responding to contingency operations with a well-trained staff. Only the functional and geographic Commanders in Chief have the power to correct this serious deficiency in our joint warfighting capability. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines deserve nothing less.

Preface

Important joint army and navy operations were conducted as early as the war of 1812.¹ Land and naval forces primarily coordinated operations by the medium in which each employed their force. In 1903 the Joint Board was established "to plan for joint operations and resolve problems of common concern to the two Services."² The arrival of the air arm with its inherent ability to operate across multiple mediums further complicated military operations and reinforced the need for an organization to coordinate these complex joint operations. World War I saw our military's first large-scale efforts to employ forces in a joint configuration. The Joint Board appreciated the increased war fighting capability provided by this joint approach and in 1935 it published *Joint Action of the Army and Navy (JAAN)*. The touchstone of our joint doctrine, JAAN mandated "one commander would be responsible for joining forces from the services into a joint task force."³ Soon after the United States entered World War II a "Unified High Command" was created to provide strategic direction of the war effort. This organization became known as the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).⁴

The organization and direction of combatant commands underwent several modifications, primarily through the National Security Act of 1947, the Key West Agreement of 1948 and the 1953 Congressional Amendment to the National Security Act. The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense (DOD) Reorganization Act of 1986 clearly resolved the issue of the authority of the JCS with regard to the combatant commands. The chain of command "runs from the President to the Secretary of Defense; and from the Secretary of Defense to the commander of the combatant commands."⁵

Throughout the cold war, U.S. military planners struggled with the problem of how to address contingency operations not related to the defense of Europe. Clearly our focus was upon our obligation to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and our planning for lesser contingencies was deficient. As one measure to address this problem, in 1980 the United States created the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF) Headquarters. This standing joint task force headquarters was the first of its kind in U.S. military history. Only a standing headquarters, it had no permanently assigned forces. Rather, it planned for the employment of joint forces from a multi-service "reservoir" of forces available for non-NATO contingencies.⁶ This approach allowed

the CINCs to maintain their focus on NATO while the RDJTF addressed other important contingencies. The CINCs and the services did not support the idea and the RDJTF was disbanded in favor of the combatant commanders' retention of responsibility for planning for the eventuality of regional contingencies.

Since the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act, much progress has been made in the way the United States prepares, organizes, and employs joint forces. Joint doctrine has grown by leaps and bounds with 98 publications either published or in development. Standards for Joint Professional Military Education are supported by each of the services. Fully one third of the course of instruction in the Navy's Senior Service College (SSC) is devoted to the study of Joint Military Operations. The other SSCs devote a similar amount of their program of instruction to the topic. Two star level general and flag officers attend a joint warfighting course at the U.S. Joint Forces Command.

Thus, the doctrine and the training bases exist to support our combatant commanders' efforts to build and maintain effective joint headquarters. Below the level of the combatant commands, however, much work is yet to be done.

Introduction

"Separate ground, sea, and air warfare is gone forever. If ever again we should be involved in war, we will fight it in all elements, with all services, as one single concentrated effort."⁷ With these words, General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower predicted the future of joint warfare even before the end of the Second World War. The U.S. military has long recognized the imperative of operating in a joint fashion. Equally well understood is the importance of employing highly trained units led by competent professional officers. While at the strategic level of war we have made great strides toward integrating the service components of the military instrument of national power, at the operational level we have but scratched the surface. **At the operational level of war, U.S. military forces can be most effective when organized and trained as Standing Joint Task Forces (SJTF).**

At the strategic level of war, an effective chain of command exists from NCA down to the commanders of the combatant commands. Functional and geographic Commanders in Chief (CINC) have permanent staffs comprised of well-trained, professional officers. A joint professional military education program is in place to train the officers who will serve on these staffs. These officers serve extended tours of duty and become high performing staff officers after a brief

period of training on the specific techniques and procedures utilized by their headquarters. U.S. Joint Forces Command (USJFCOM), trains our two star level general and flag officers for theater-level joint leadership responsibilities.⁸ Our successes in Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM illustrate the capability of these highly trained commanders and their permanently assigned staffs to synchronize the efforts of joint forces at the theater strategic level of war.

Our recent history, however, indicates that most major operations are fought by an organization subordinate to the highly trained CINC staff just described. While the war fighting CINCs support the operation with forces and resources, a subordinate Joint Task Force (JTF) is usually created to control the operation. This two-tiered system allows the CINC to focus his staff on the overarching, enduring responsibilities of his geographic or functional area while the JTF assumes responsibility for a specific, limited military operation requiring a joint command and control headquarters. Joint Publication 3-0 contends that this system was successfully employed in Operations URGENT FURY and JUST CAUSE.⁹ After action reviews from these operations indicate that, while the operations were successful, the *ad hoc* nature of the JTF structures posed significant difficulties for the JTFs.

Joint doctrine instructs that "those who will lead joint forces *must develop skill* in orchestrating air, land, sea, space, and special operations forces into smoothly functioning joint teams."¹⁰ Just as in any other complex activity and in any other organization, the development of this skill takes time. It cannot be attained by "standing up" an *ad hoc* JTF during time of crisis. Two of our former Service Chiefs, Generals Reimer and Fogelman, described the complexity of joint military operations when they said: "One lifetime is barely sufficient to master every skill needed to fight and lead in one medium of war. Learning to fight jointly in three is a tough business - leveraging unique capabilities, specialties, and individual competencies to the warfighting advantage of all."¹¹ This complexity exists not only at the theater strategic level of war, but at any level of command that employs joint forces. At the operational level of war, where we expect to fight as *ad hoc* JTFs, this complexity can overwhelm forming or newly formed staffs.

The current construct for *ad hoc* JTF organization (or more appropriately, lack of organization) is, however, firmly entrenched in service parochialism. Each service advocates the necessity of "training as we expect to fight" and yet none will go as far as organizing in a manner that will create well trained, effective staffs below the level of the combatant

commands. Only when we overcome service parochialism and organize our forces in the joint configuration in which we expect to employ them will we maximize our joint warfighting capabilities.

Joint & Service Perspectives...What does our Doctrine Say?

Joint Publication 3-0 provides the principles and doctrine for the conduct of joint operations. It is authoritative for the services, combatant commands and their subordinates. This doctrine instructs that "the commanders of unified commands may establish: ...JTFs to accomplish missions with specific, limited objectives and which do not require overall centralized control of logistics." This doctrine also states that JTF operations are normally conducted to achieve operational level objectives and that the JTF is dissolved when the purpose for which it was created has been achieved.¹² By their very definition, today's JTFs are *ad hoc* organizations.

Each of the services has embraced this joint doctrine and their service doctrines reflect commitment to improving our collective ability to operate jointly. Senior leaders from each of our services practice this doctrine as they rise to the level of command of our combatant commands. Each emphasizes the need for joint training and a thorough familiarity with the other members of the joint team. The

last decade has witnessed numerous examples of combatant commanders from each of our services taking the lead in organizing JTFs to accomplish operational level missions.

The Navy's white papers From the Sea (1992) and Forward From the Sea (1994) "directed the naval forces away from open-ocean maritime strategy toward naval expeditionary forces for joint and combined operations."¹³ Naval Doctrine Publication 1, Naval Warfare, co-authored by the Chief of Naval Operations and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, states the naval position in these unequivocal terms: "We are committed to full partnership in joint operations."¹⁴ It highlights the importance of honing the teamwork needed to operate in the joint environment"¹⁵ and goes on to caution that "the many successes achieved by joint forces in carefully planned and intricate operations remind us not only of the importance of inter-service cooperation, but also of the inherent complexities involved in coordinating such major efforts."¹⁶

Naval forces have long appreciated the force multiplication inherent in joint operations. Equally well understood is the difficulty in integrating the myriad functions of a joint force. The Marine Corps has taken the lead in naval efforts to resolve this organizational issue. In 1983, the Marine Corps permanently combined the elements of their air and ground components to form the Marine Air-Ground

Task Force. In 1995, the Commandant of the Marine Corps established the first contingency SJTF since the RDJTF of the 1980s.¹⁷ Unlike JTF-B, a standing JTF in Honduras with an enduring mission, this SJTF was organized to provide immediate response to contingencies requiring a joint force. This SJTF was, however, joint in name only. The U.S. Navy supplied a handful of staff and the other services supplied even less. The Marines' SJTF was disbanded due to an inability to resource required joint force functions from the other services, not because it was deficient in any other manner.

U.S. Air Force doctrine recognizes "the Air Force will normally operate as a member of an interdependent team of land, naval, air, space and special operations forces."¹⁸ This doctrine stresses the importance of maintaining the core competencies of the Air Force and the requirement to integrate these competencies with those of her sister services.¹⁹ This basic Air Force doctrine acknowledges its subordination to joint doctrine and addresses the formation of JTFs as outlined in Joint Publication 1. While the process of forming JTF headquarters receives only a cursory study in Air Force Doctrine Document 1, this doctrine addresses in great detail the methods in which the Air Force will contribute forces to a JTF.

The U.S. Army's basic doctrinal publication, FM 100-5, Operations recognizes the primacy of our nation's joint doctrine and the fact that we will fight our wars in a joint configuration. It defines doctrine as "the statement of how America's Army, as part of a joint team, intends to conduct war and operations other than war."²⁰ Similar to the basic Air Force doctrinal publication, FM 100-5 stresses the importance of the Army providing the joint force commander with trained forces. Again, much like Air Force doctrine, Army basic doctrine acknowledges the combatant commanders' prerogative to form joint task forces but does not discuss in detail how these *ad hoc* headquarters will be formed. FM 100-5 does warn that Army component staffs may be expected to fill a forming *ad hoc* JTF staff with Army expertise.

Joint doctrine has been promulgated to the point that it is understood and accepted by each of the services. All agree that, at the operational level of war, JTFs subordinate to the combatant commander are likely to be formed. All agree this arrangement is prudent because it frees the CINC's headquarters to maintain a theater strategic level focus. Attempts to create permanent joint task forces, both at the National Command Authority level (the RDJTF) and at the Service level (the U.S.M.C. SJTF) have failed. The combatant commanders are, therefore, faced with the challenge of how

best to form, organize, and train *ad hoc* JTFs to conduct complex joint operations.

How do the CINCs Form Joint Task Forces?

Standing forces are organized on a permanent basis. Their headquarters are organized and function on a daily basis to provide essential command and control functions necessary for mission accomplishment. When a situation (normally crisis) arises that requires a headquarters to orchestrate joint effort, the combatant commander has the option to form a JTF. Joint Doctrine provides these combatant commanders with three options to be used to form a JTF headquarters. They are the use of a standing JTF headquarters, the formation of an *ad hoc* HQ from various contributors or the augmentation of a core Service component headquarters.²¹ Important to note is that each of these headquarters is, to some degree, *ad hoc* in nature.

The Standing JTF. The option to use a standing joint task force (SJTF) headquarters has numerous advantages. Perhaps the most important advantage is that the team is already formed at the time of the crisis that necessitates its employment. Staff members are familiar with the techniques and procedures utilized by the command. Boards and centers utilized to orchestrate staff effort are routine and practiced and members of the headquarters have a thorough understanding

of the capabilities and limitations of one another. Likewise, subordinate components understand what is expected of them and what they can expect from the JTF commander and his staff. Through their routine operation as a subordinate organization of the JTF, they become familiar with the military decision making processes utilized by the JTF headquarters. The crisis action planning process utilized within the JTF becomes routine.

The primary disadvantage of this option is that it might run the risk of dividing the unity of effort of the JTF. That is to say, a division between the principal reason for the existence of the SJTF and the emerging mission requiring a JTF response. Our doctrine indicates that JTFs are normally disbanded when their objective is achieved. If the mission of the SJTF is complete, certainly it could be maintained as a functioning command and control headquarters, applying its attention to the new mission requiring a JTF response. If, however, the original reason for its being is still unsatisfied, the SJTF, if chosen to address the emerging crisis, would have to divide its attention between two missions. This disadvantage could be overcome by the creation of SJTFs whose sole function would be to plan for employment in contingency operations.

U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), U.S. Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) and USJFCOM employ SJTFs. Each utilizes these SJTFs for broad continuing missions; they are not oriented toward contingency operations. JTF-B's performance in providing humanitarian assistance across a geographically large Joint Operations Area following Hurricane Mitch is a recent example of the utility of this approach. The lessons learned in the after action review of this operation included a recognition of "the value of a forward deployed standing JTF, especially the regionally oriented and experience[d] command and control headquarters."²² Neither the formation of an *ad hoc* headquarters nor the augmentation of a core service headquarters would have provided such a high quality command and control headquarters as this SJTF option provided.

Formation of an *ad hoc* Headquarters. The advantage of this option is that it requires no resources. No personnel, equipment, money, time, effort, or thought is invested in this option. The old adage "you get what you pay for" comes to mind as one ponders this option.

The disadvantages are the corollary of the SJTF option described earlier. In this option, the team forms as the crisis necessitating the employment of a JTF is developing. The members of the team are in this formation stage during the critical planning phase of the operation. Training, the key

to quick, effective mission execution is lacking.²³ Staff members are unfamiliar with one another and with the techniques and procedures utilized by the command. Subordinate components of the JTF are equally unaware of the expectations of the JTF commander and his staff. The result is that everyone from the CINC's staff on down the chain of command is trying to understand: what is expected from superior and by subordinate commanders and their staffs; what is the process utilized to produce these products; and how do I fit into this process.

During contingency operations not related to the broad, continuing missions satisfied by their standing joint task forces (JTF-NW and JTF-B), USCENTCOM and USSOUTHCOM plan to use the *ad hoc* approach to JTF formation. The primary reason they have chosen this alternative is that they have no assigned forces. To form a subordinate JTF headquarters, the CINC "first defines the general mission, then selects a Commander, JTF (CJTF) from the service whose forces predominate...the CJTF then forms his staff from among the forces provided with augmentation by *available* members of the CINC's staff."²⁴

USCENTCOM's lessons learned from operations in Somalia highlight the difficulties in the *ad hoc* approach to organization. During Operation UNOSOM II the CJTF met his

staff only after he arrived in Somalia. Even then, less than a third of the staff had deployed when operations commenced. The lesson learned is grossly understated: "Mission execution is more difficult without trained and well-organized staffs..."²⁵ A contingency operations oriented SJTF headquarters, while it could not entirely overcome the difficulties associated with bringing new service component organizations up to speed with JTF expectations, would have solved many of the problems associated with the JTF itself.

Augmentation of a Core Service Component Headquarters.

Somewhat of a middle ground between the two earlier approaches, this option mitigates the difficulties of organizing a staff in the midst of a crisis by utilizing an existing component staff as the nucleus of the joint staff. U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) pioneered the effort formalize the process by which this option is executed. USJFC and U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) have adopted the USPACOM process.

CINCPAC has designated and trained six headquarters to serve as JTFs. These are I Corps, III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), Seventh Fleet, Alaskan Command, I MEF, and Third Fleet. "Each receives regular, focused training in JTF operations, and upon activation as a JTF are reinforced with the CINCPAC deployable JTF Augmentation Cell (DJTFAC)."²⁶ In USPACOM, DJTFAC personnel are drawn from a "trained pool of

CINCPAC headquarters and Hawaii-based service component personnel". In USEUCOM the same is true for each of its six potential JTFs, however, DJTFAC personnel are battle rostered against specific JTF vacancies.²⁷

The primary advantage of this option is that the service component core of the potential JTF provides a well-trained cohesive staff. The DJTFAC augments this service specific nucleus with the expertise of the other components of the joint force. In theory, this DJTFAC would also bring insight from the CINC's headquarters that would not otherwise be found resident in the service component core. The annual training program in both USPACOM and USEUCOM includes an academic session for the JTF's core staff, a crisis action planning exercise, and a Joint Chiefs of Staff Exercise. In theory, battle rostered DJTFAC personnel attending this training would gain an appreciation of the JTF's unique policies and procedures; an understanding of the boards and centers used by that JTF for its anticipated employment options; and an opinion of their fellow staff officers' strengths and weaknesses.

The disadvantage of this option is that it is not uniformly applied in practice. The CINC's staff is always consumed by more work than they can do and are hard pressed to release valuable staff officers from ongoing operations to

support JTF training. Supporting components face the same dilemma and may not share the CINC's opinion of the importance of this JTF training.

In USEUCOM, U.S. Army Southern European Task Force (USASETAF), when activated as a JTF, is allocated a 21 man DJTFAC. Of these staff augmentees, one is an O-6, six are O-5s, eight are O-5/4, and three are O-4. Although CINCEUCOM has directed that the DJTFAC will participate once biannually with each of the six USEUCOM directed JTFs, thus participating in three major exercises per year, operational tempo has prevented them from participating in a single exercise in the last two years. Rather, USEUCOM participates with available staff. Of the eighteen field grade officers allocated to a USASETAF led JTF, not more than six participated in an exercise during the last two years.

After action reviews conducted following the last academic training and Crisis Action Procedures Exercise conducted by USASETAF indicated that 60% of the JTF staff found themselves "coming to grips with a Joint Standing Operating Procedure that they did not create for themselves."²⁸ The report further amplified the difficulties associated with assimilating new staff members while simultaneously conducting crisis action planning. "The critical first 48 hours of JTF operations stretched the staff as a predominantly Army staff

transitioned to a joint staff planning for command and control of a sizable joint force. New staff officers issued competing and conflicting guidance due to their unfamiliarity with the Joint Standing Operating Procedures. Routine and critical interfaces were unclear, as were expectations of various boards and centers."²⁹ A SJTF headquarters, like a CINC's headquarters, would establish these procedures as a matter of routine and they would be well rehearsed before a crisis mandated the employment of the JTF.

The concept of augmenting a service component core headquarters with a DJTFAC is a futile attempt to address an issue only our CINCs can fix. If it is unreasonable to expect DJTFAC augmentation from the CINC's staff during peacetime operations, it is even more unreasonable to expect it during times of crisis. As President Theodore Roosevelt expressed to the graduating class of the Naval Academy in 1902: "It cannot be too often repeated that in modern war...the chief factor in achieving triumph is what has been done in the way of thorough preparation and training before the beginning of war."³⁰

The SJTF, an Alternative or a Doctrinal Imperative?

The creation of standing JTFs to be employed in contingency operations would solve many of the deficiencies inherent in the alternatives now provided by joint doctrine. Joint Publication 0-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF)

vests combatant command (COCOM) authority in the commanders of combatant commands. COCOM is the CINC's authority to "perform those functions of command over assigned forces involving organizing and employing commands and forces..."³¹ Clearly, COCOM is the authority necessary for the CINC to assign forces, a DJTFAC element for example, to his subordinate commands.

The first and most vehement argument against this proposal would be: "This is a force structure issue. Where are we going to get the personnel spaces for this?" I would argue that it has nothing to do with additional structure. It has everything to do with our CINCs organizing their current force structure as they intend to fight.

Today, many of our CINCs tell their potential contingency JTF commanders to expect augmentation from the CINC's staff during time of crisis. They also tell these same component commanders that, should they be selected to lead a JTF, they can expect augmentation from the other components. Why not permanently task organize assigned forces in this manner? The CINCs have already completed the mission and troop-to-task analyses that tell them how the JTFs should be organized. Manning documents, USEUCOM Directive 55-11 for example, exist to round out these JTFs. These manning documents delineate

between service component core positions, CINC (DJTFAC) positions, and other service component augmentation positions.

Under the standing contingency oriented JTF concept that I propose, these DJTFAC and other augmentation personnel would be permanently tasked to the JTF. An example might be that an Operations Officer from Alaskan Command, currently slated to augment an I MEF led JTF would be permanently attached to the MEF. To fill the void within Alaskan Command, the Operations Officer from the MEF, currently slated to support an Alaskan Command led JTF would be attached to the Alaskan Command. Service components would experience some transitional difficulties but the real challenge would be for the CINCs. Instead of promising DJTFAC augmentation during crisis, they would have to carve it out of hide during peacetime operations. In other words, they would have to train as they expect to fight. Certainly there would be growing pains associated with the initial transition to this organization but the long-term gain inherent in a standing contingency oriented JTF organization would outweigh the temporary inconvenience of the transition.

Conclusion

At the operational level of war, U.S. military forces can be most effective when organized and trained as Standing Joint Task Forces (SJTF). Our combatant commanders have been vested

with authority to accomplish this reorganization. To complete such a sweeping change to the way we conduct ourselves without breaking service component rice bowls is impossible. Our Commanders in Chief will have to overcome service parochialism; that alone will take Herculean effort and intense personal courage on their part. The direct, profound result of their effort will be the well-trained, coherent, high performing warfighting staffs our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines deserve.

Notes

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